

Canons of the Fifth Ecumenical Council

The Holy and Ecumenical Fifth Council (which was the second one held in Constantinople) was held in the year 553 in the reign of Emperor Justinian I. According to Dositheus (Book V, ch. 16 of the *Dodecabilus*), its proceedings and transactions were contained in eight Acts written in Latin, and, according to the *Collection of the Councils* (p. 261 of vol. ii), in five written in Greek. It was attended by Fathers to the number of 165, among whom Menas shone with the greatest splendor at first, and afterwards in succession Eutychius, both of them having served as Patriarchs of Constantinople; followed by Vigilius, the Bishop of Rome, who, though at the time in Constantinople, was not actually present at the Council itself either in person or by proxies (as, for instance, was done at the Second Ecumenical Council), but who nevertheless sanctioned the Council later in a written publication; Apolinarius of Alexandria, Domnus of Antioch, Didymus and Evagrius, these two taking the place of and representing Eustochius of Jerusalem. The Council anathematized the written works of Diodorus of Tarsoupolis (or Tarsus) and those of Theodore of Mopsuestia, and indeed even Theodore himself, and Diodorus, according to Photius, Code 18, and the respective Act of the Seventh Ec. C. See also p. 14 in the first volume of the *Series concerning the Reporters*, who, holding the tenets of Nestorius, left these records in writing upon their death (especially Theodore of Mopsuestia, who served as the teacher of Nestorius and declared the Logos to be a different God than the one called Christ, who was troubled by the passions of the soul and by the desires of the flesh). It also anathematized what had been written by blissful Theodoret against the twelve “heads” (or “chapters”) of St. Cyril^[116] (of Alexandria), and the so-called letter of Ibas, the Bishop of Edessa, to Mares the Persian.^[117] It further anathematized even Origen himself, and Didymus, and Evagrius, and their detestable tenets, who foolishly affirmed that souls were existent prior to bodies,^[118] and that upon the death of one body they enter another; that there is an end to the punishment suffered in hell; that demons are going to recover the original dignity of angelic grace which they used to have; that souls are going to be resurrected naked without a body; and that the heavenly bodies have souls; and still other cacodoxical notions. It also anathematized Anthimus of Trebizond for entertaining the ungodly beliefs of Eutyches, and also Severus, and Peter the Bishop of Apameia, and Zooras.^[119] But this Council did not promulgate any Canons relating to the ecclesiastical constitution, but only fourteen anathematizations against the said heretics and others, and twenty-five more directed solely against the Origenists (p. 341 of the second volume of the *Councils*).

Notes

[116] Note that what had been written by Theodoret against St. Cyril was not anathematized in general (i.e., in toto), like what had been written by Theodore of Mopsuestia and like the Letter of Ibas, not only as much therein as defended the cacodoxy of Nestorius and through misunderstanding represented Cyril as a heretic. It does not include, as is plain from the objections offered by St. Cyril, the idea that “Theodoret calls the union of the God Logos with the human being a relative union (or a relational union), and anathematizes those who call the union a substantive (hypostasis or substantial) union, on the alleged ground that it is alien to the Divine Scriptures and to the Divine Fathers.” Nor the idea that a hypostasis substantive union is superfluous, and all the other points that St. Cyril controverts and deems blasphemous: for anathema anyone that praises these ideas. But it is not true that the Council also anathematized this dogma, namely, that the Holy Spirit does not have its existence either from the Son or through the Son, which Theodoret therein asserts, since this tenet was not one held by Nestorius, but was and is a dogma of the catholic Church. That is why neither divine Cyril at any time in his life, nor Pope Celestinus in writing against Nestorius, or John of Antioch, or Acacius of Verroia in his recommendations to Nestorius, nor any of the emperors in their *Sacrae* against Nestorius, say that Nestorius blasphemed as regarding the Theology of the Holy Spirit, but only as regarding the incarnate economy, as we have said.

[117] I said “so-called” because Cedrenus also characterizes it thus, as does also Evagrius (page 346 of Vol. II of the *Collection of the Councils*, and page 347 *ibid.*), and especially because in Act 6 of the Seventh Ecumenical Council it was said to have been written from Ibas, but nevertheless it is not true that it was also written by him. That is why the Fathers of the Fourth Ecumenical Council did not anathematize Ibas himself, but only this letter, on the score that it accused the Council held in Ephesus of having condemned Nestorius without a trial, that it rejected the twelve “heads” (or “chapters”) of St. Cyril, that it praised Nestor and Theodore of Mopsuestia, whom it accepted as a saint and Orthodox Christian, and that it acknowledged Christ to be a mere human being. For even Ibas himself acknowledged at the Fourth Ecumenical Council that the letter was not one of his own, and at the same time confessed all the Orthodox dogmas contrary thereto (page 372 of the second volume of the *Conciliar Records*, and page 390 *ibid.*).

[118] This pre-existence of souls was declared by Origen to be the reason for predestination and damnation. For if the souls in the transmundane world have done right, they are predestined to the kingdom; but if they have done wrong, they are

damned and consigned to hell. Jerome wrote a letter against this opinion to Pammachius, and Leo denounced it in his letter 93, and Cyril of Alexandria refuted it by means of twenty-four arguments.

[119] Nicholas Boulgaris in his Sacred Catechism, page 133, says, I know not on what grounds, that the Fifth Ecumenical Council anathematized Peter Knapheus for saying: “The immortal Holy One who was crucified for us.” For that man was not anathematized by the Fifth Council, but a goodly number of years before the Fifth Council by a Synod or Council held against him in Rome during the time of Felix of Rome, and of Acacius of Constantinople, and of Emperor Zeno.